

Political Hedonists, the English —but Watch Mrs. Thatcher Go

BY WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY JR.

NEW YORK—There are a number of rather mean interpretations floating about Great Britain to account for the astonishing victory of Margaret Thatcher, the most pointed of which is that the Tories have no prospects whatever of taking power so they may as well have a spell of tokenism under a woman leader, after which, when the next election contest looms, she can be dumped and replaced by someone serious.

Another is that the Conservative Party has really become a vermiform appendix of British politics and, under the circumstances, it makes no particular difference who is the opposition leader, and Mrs. Thatcher is superbly qualified to serve as a Nobody.

Malcolm Muggeridge, who is terrifyingly skilled in the art of disparagement, was asked on television to account for Mrs. Thatcher's victory. "Her victory is the direct result of a medium," he said, remarking yet again the frequently remarked absence, in Edward Heath, of telegenic charm. "Does Mrs. Thatcher come through on television?" he was asked. "Well," he said with his dangerous, angel-smile, "she has a certain imbecile charm."

The English approach to politics is these days entirely hedonistic. Inasmuch as the country is headed toward the cliff, and nobody has the combination of will and power to keep it from going over, everybody is enjoying the parade.

The Daily Telegraph, whose political reporters are a joy to read, gave an account of the debate in the House of Commons on the afternoon just before the vote that deposed Heath. Everyone's mind was on the forthcoming vote. "What was needed," writer John O'Sullivan solemnly noted in his dispatch, "above all in this tense atmosphere was a good joke—and that was provided by Mr. Robert Adley (C-Christchurch and Lymington) and fate working in unison.

"Mr. Adley had put down a question on the order paper. Would Mr. Wilson place in the Commons Library a copy of his speech on the current economic situation delivered on Monday, 20th of January to the TUC Labour Party Liaison Committee?

"No," replied Mr. Wilson. "I made no such speech."

"Then that," responded Mr. Adley, neatly avoiding a bad fall, "would account for its absence from the library." Relieved by the op-

portunity to break the tension, MPs on all sides laughed uproariously."

Another reporter, Adrian Berry, during the blissfully short (one-week) campaign involving William Whitelaw and Mrs. Thatcher, led off his story two days before the election as follows: "Mrs. Margaret Thatcher appeared to increase her chances of election victory as party leader yesterday when she received a standing ovation of one minute and ten seconds after speaking to some 700 people at the Young Conservatives National Conference at Eastbourne.

"Mr. William Whitelaw, by contrast, seemed to lose ground by his failure to produce a speech.

"Instead, restricting himself to questions and answers, he replied to dull questions in a somewhat dull manner—mainly on the fairly dull subject of the future devolution of political power."

That is good straightforward stuff and should be emulated by all American reporters.

But note the standing ovation for Mrs. Thatcher—by young Conservatives. They like her because she is wonderfully straightforward and, *mirabile dictu*, unapologetically conservative concerning things like inflation, labor union make-work, the tyranny of the Trade Union Congress.

Her background is impressive in a party that has tended, when looking for a leader, to thumb through lists of unemployed Etonians. She worked her way through school and became a research chemist. In her 20s, she became interested in law—and took a law degree and practiced.

That is the kind of upward mobility the Socialists are always talking about, and always resenting because, after all, if you rise, almost by definition you rise with reference to others who do not.

Mrs. Thatcher has communicated successfully at least to the young Conservatives, and indeed to the majority of Conservative members in the House of Commons, that she wants others in England to have the same opportunities she has had—which means an opportunity for the kingdom to rise up from the sticky coils of egalitarian socialism.

It is my guess she bears watching. Put me down as a fan.